Chapter Five DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5. Discussions and Conclusion

5.1. Theoretical implications

Drawing on the limitations articulated in extant literature, this research sought to examine agile marketing capabilities empirically from a consumer perspective, by building on previous exploratory organizational studies on the topic. The study employed the principles of Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) Environmental Psychology to investigate the combined effects of AMCs and consumer's emotional states on fashion repurchase intentions. Simultaneously, the study also aimed to address contextual gaps in existing app marketing academia by basing its findings particularly on pureplay multibrand fashion apps in the UAE.

To begin with, the study adds further knowledge to the *qualitative* nascent literature on agile marketing in the domain of fashion apps by operationalizing AMCs into five dimensions – newness of assortment, personalization, transparent user experience, ubiquity, and after-sales service, based on similar constructs investigated in earlier *quantitative* studies. Next it demonstrates that AMCs, when considered as a marketing stimuli in the digital environment of fashion apps, can influence users' affective states which in turn may impact purchase behaviour, thereby validating the application of the S-O-R theory in the context of pureplay multibrand fashion apps (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Overall, the study highlights emotions of dominance and arousal as key precursors of repeat purchases in comparison to pleasure. It also demonstrates how arousal and dominance in turn are strongly influenced by trendier fashion collections and a platform's transparency, respectively.

Findings reveal that newness of assortment significantly influences feelings of arousal. This is in confirmation with Lim *et al.* (2021) whose research illustrates positive effects of assortment and marketing mix on consumer engagement. Considering the common aspect of 'excitement' between engagement and arousal, this finding suggests that consumers are excited by trendy designs and new launches, as expected (Moi and Cabiddu, 2020; Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2021). This also aligns with the behavioural data collected in this study, which shows browsing for new styles and trends is main purpose of using fashion apps, besides shopping itself (see Figure 3, Chapter 4). However, while newness of assortment emerges as a relatively strong precursor of arousal, personalization does little to create a similar sense of excitement in pureplay fashion apps. Though other authors highlight the importance of human touch from personalized and anthropomorphic features as a key

driver of engagement in mobile apps (Kim *et al.*, 2016; Lim *et al.*, 2021), this study suggests that the effects of personalization on users' excitement levels are rather insignificant. This could probably be because users in the current context either did not experience enough personalized content that could stimulate them (as indicated by the relatively lower mean scores and higher standard deviations for personalization, Table 9.), or simply experienced a drop in engagement levels as a result of overexposure to personalized content in the form of remarketing ads, YouTube ads, push notifications, and a constant influx of promotional emails (Bretous, 2021).

As expected, further results demonstrate that transparent user experience is a largely significant precursor of dominance. This assents with several existing findings that evidence the positive effects of features such as informativeness, delivery quality, perceived informativeness and channel transparency on app continuance (Kim *et al.*, 2016; Ali and Bhasin, 2019; Hsieh, Lee and Tseng, 2021; Lim *et al.*, 2021). This also follows Chiu *et al.'s* (2014) correlation between perceived risk and utilitarian value in the sense that transparency constitutes a form of utilitarian agility which reduces consumer's perceived risk, thereby enhancing control over the shopping experience.

In comparison to transparency however, the mere ubiquity of mobile apps is not enough to elicit feelings of dominance. This diverges from existing literature that shows a positive association between ubiquity/ perceived ubiquity and dominance (Kim *et al.*, 2016; Hsieh, Lee and Tseng, 2021). Insignificance of ubiquity is also evident considering that most consumers preferred to access the app at home (see Table 8.). This suggests that despite the country's high internet penetration, mobile data in the UAE could probably be expensive for customers of high street fashion apps (The World Bank, 2019). Users subscribing to data packages could probably be using it for faster, routine tasks like e-mail and WhatsApp messaging, unlike shopping which is relatively more time consuming. Others having access to public Wi-Fi networks would probably be insecure about leaking payment credentials from shopping apps on insecure networks. These findings highlight the need to complement the tangible ubiquitous aspect of mobile apps with agile transparent process. These may include real-time updates, safe and transparent payments, and dynamic fixes, to build a mobile environment which, despite lack of physical touchpoints, can still provide consumers with a strong sense of control and continuity over their shopping experience (Hsieh, Lee and Tseng, 2021; Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2021).

In terms of post-delivery agility, after-sales service significantly improved consumer's happiness levels within multibrand fashion apps, concurring with expectations from literature (Ali and Bhasin, 2019; Lim *et al.*, 2021) . However, the relatively lower coefficient of determination obtained for this association signals that there are potentially several other factors besides an efficient and flexible post-delivery system which contribute to users' overall happiness, such as gamification and incentivization (Hsu and Chen, 2018; Tseng, Hsieh and Lee, 2021) . As illustrated in literature, some of these include even non-agile features such as entertainment, aesthetics, and shopper's hedonic orientation (Chiu *et al.*, 2014; Hsu and Chen, 2018; Hsieh, Lee and Tseng, 2021), indicating that agility is perhaps not the single most efficient antecedent of pleasure.

Out of the three emotional states, this study exhibits that dominance has the strongest impact on repurchase intentions, thereby corroborating with findings from Hsieh, Lee and Tseng (2021) who assert positive links between dominance and app continuances, and Ali and Bhasin (2019) who ascertain positive effects of consumer trust (sense of reliability/ control) on repeat purchases. This also aligns with research from Chiu et al., (2014) which states perceived risk *negatively* moderates the path between utilitarian benefits and repeat purchases. Thus, when perceived risk is low (i.e., dominance/ control is high), utilitarian benefits such as the platform's transparency are likely to influence app usage continuance. Almost at par with dominance, arousal too significantly influences fashion repurchases as expected based on several findings illuminating the effects of arousal and consumer engagement on purchase behaviour (De Canio, Fuentes-Blasco and Martinelli, 2021; Hsieh, Lee and Tseng, 2021; Lim *et al.*, 2021; Tseng, Hsieh and Lee, 2021). However, while other studies examine emotional states within their respective contexts such as gamification, anthropomorphism, single brand apps, or general m-commerce, this study investigates the effects of emotions derived specifically from agile marketing stimuli in a pureplay multibrand context.

Surprisingly, this research reveals that while pleasure does influence repurchase intentions slightly positively, these effects are *not* significant. This implies that just because consumers may be happy with a particular fashion app platform, pleasure alone is not sufficient enough to engage them in repeat purchases. This contradicts findings from other academics who have established significant associations between pleasure / enjoyment and purchase behaviour (McLean *et al.*, 2019; De Canio, Fuentes-Blasco and Martinelli, 2021; Hsieh, Lee and Tseng, 2021). However, the insignificant association between pleasure and repeat

purchases observed in this study does agree with findings of Antwi (2021) which show that customer satisfaction (a form of pleasure) does not influence repurchase intentions. This could also indicate a previously unexplored geographical justification, as both the present study and that of Antwi's (2021) took place in the MENA region, whereas contradictory findings from other authors cited were derived from studies conducted in the UK and Asia Pacific regions. Perhaps consumers in the MENA region are exposed to satisfactory levels of after-sales service from most apps (making customer satisfaction a non-differentiator), or simply derive greater pleasure from shopping on other formats. The non-significance of pleasure and relatively lower significance of arousal (as a hedonic emotions) compared to dominance (which is more utilitarian) , is also in line with other findings which demonstrate that hedonic values are weaker predictors of repeat purchases than utilitarian values (Chiu *et al.*, 2014).

5.2.   Managerial implications

Apart from theoretical contributions, the findings from this study offer several practical implications for industry professionals. These findings would be of particular interest to fashion app marketers and app developers who are constantly seeking to optimize user retention for their mobile platforms.

One of the key implications of this study is that AMCs have an indirect impact on consumers' repurchase intentions. This effect is facilitated by users' emotional states. Therefore, if marketers want to drive user retention, they should work backward by first mapping the emotions that influence repeat purchases, and then identifying the AMCs which trigger these emotions (see Figure 14. below).

Firstly, marketers should consider eliciting feelings of dominance in the users of their apps. This would help impart a sense of control and minimize consumers' perceived risk. To do so, marketers can focus on building a transparent user experience in collaboration with the product development team. The app interface could include designated sections for order tracking coupled with timely push notifications and email alerts (Hsieh, Lee and Tseng, 2021; Lim *et al.*, 2021). Visibility of key contact information such as customer service number, email, and delivery valet's contact could be enhanced with prominent placements. Most pureplay fashion apps in the UAE still lack virtual helpdesks, when compared to app interfaces in western countries (Lim *et al.*, 2021). Thus, marketers can leverage tools like chatbots to

further enhance transparency. Out of all the apps studied, only STYLI seemed to have a similar feature in the form of WhatsApp for Business, using which consumers can directly chat with a representative. Other apps may want to consider leveraging such tools before being left behind by emerging competitors. In addition, content marketers could also produce detailed copy and leverage other formats of product display such as video catwalks used by ASOS or AR try-ons used by Farfetch (Fish, 2019; McDowell, 2021). This would help shoppers who are prone to second-guessing in minimizing their uncertainty. Social teams can also build transparency outside the app by hosting live streaming and Q&A sessions to help customers clarify any grey areas.

Following dominance, feelings of arousal also influence repurchases significantly. Accordingly, user experience designers should consider providing functionality that stimulates or excites users to return to the app. This study identifies newness of a platform's fashion assortment has one of the key triggers of user excitement. Marketers are therefore advised to be agile in terms of scouting the latest trends and forecasting accurate demand, preferably using Artificial Intelligence (Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan, 2021). New trends could also be scouted from users themselves by studying their in-app search history or embedding camera search functionality like ASOS's Style Match feature to display new assortments personalized to the user's taste (Canales, 2018). Managers may also consider signing exclusive contracts with the brands being retailed on their mobile stores. However, since multibrand apps usually have a significant number of overlapping brands, implementing exclusivity might be challenging. For example, among the top ten brands stocked on the apps discussed in this study, key brands like Mango, Nike, adidas, Tommy Hilfiger, and Calvin Klein are available at almost all the apps (Edited Market Analytics, 2021). Perhaps multibrand apps can consider collaborating with local artists or bigger brands to launch new and exclusive collections, or hype regular collections with VIP programs, remarketing ads, and pop-up experiences.

This study further highlights that feelings of pleasure do not necessarily lead to repeat purchases indicating that most m-commerce providers in the region must be at par in terms of customer satisfaction (Antwi, 2021). However, for emerging apps or apps struggling with customer happiness, this study reveals the significance of after-sales service as a key driver of pleasure. Thus, managers should consider deploying an agile warehousing and logistics network to ensure smooth returns and exchanges (Moi and Cabiddu, 2020). They could also

offer gifts with purchase for high value customers or differentiate in the after-sales space with repair services to enhance customer happiness.

Importantly, this study also shows that Gen Zs in U.A.E are significantly less likely to repurchase from local apps compared to older Millennials (section 4.4.). This should alert regional marketers to boost retention programs for younger consumers who are soon to become core category shoppers. Gen Zs could be dropping out either to shop from budget stores like SHEIN, or vintage stores on Instagram, or escalating towards purpose-driven brands (Edelman, 2018; Ahmed *et al.*, 2019). M-commerce managers may therefore consider resonating with Gen Z-centric values like purpose and community in order to retain the cohort. In addition, though statistically insignificant, Gen Zs were also more likely use the app outside their homes. Therefore, marketers could also build agility with geomarketing (Hsieh, Lee and Tseng, 2021) by sending push notifications during common commute times, or build offline functionality like Netflix to enhance the app's ubiquity for such users. Lastly, the study dismisses any significant effects of gender and age on consumer's app usage frequency and location signaling the need to build timely and location-specific content for all users irrespective of their demographics.
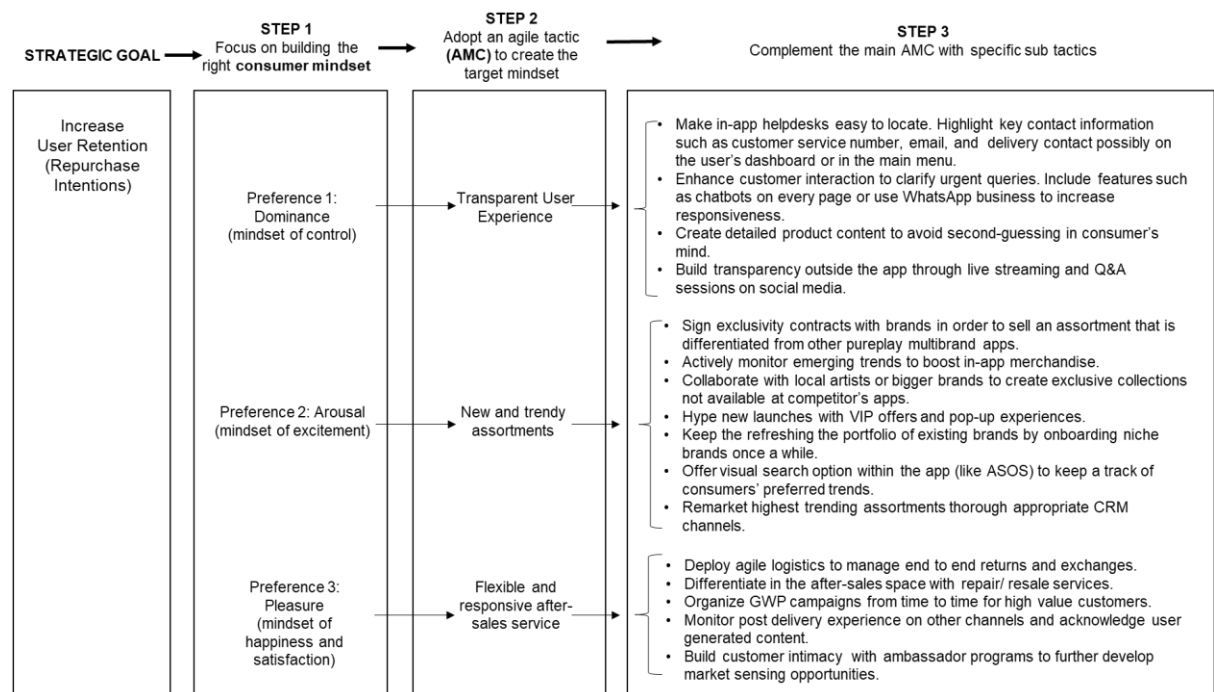

Figure 14: Managerial implications and recommendations.

5.3. Originality and Contribution to Scholarship

To the best of the author's knowledge this is among the first few studies to have empirically examined AMCs from a consumer perspective. The study contributes original consumer insights to a topic that has, till date, been largely explored from an organizational perspective only (Hagen, Zucchella and Ghauri, 2019; Ewel, 2020; Moi and Cabiddu, 2020). The study builds on the seminal theory of environmental psychology (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), confirming its validity in a new and specific context of pureplay multibrand apps which was not investigated in previous research. By doing so, it widens the scope of both the S-O-R theory (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) and mobile app usage continuance literature (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Groß, 2016; McLean *et al.*, 2019).

Most importantly, the conceptual model developed in this study contributes to scholarship and industry by providing an explanation about the consumer psychology at play in the interaction between AMCs and repurchase intentions. Specifically, it emphasizes on the feelings of dominance and arousal in driving repeat purchases, concurring with literature (De Canio, Fuentes-Blasco and Martinelli, 2021; Hsieh, Lee and Tseng, 2021; Lim *et al.*, 2021), and further demonstrates how agile cues like platform transparency and newness of assortment can help in eliciting such emotions.

In addition, while other authors such as Hsieh, Lee and Tseng (2021), have explicitly illustrated positive effects of pleasure of app continuance, this study shows that such effects are not statistically significant in the present context. Thus, as suggested by Antwi (2021), this finding shows that perhaps customer satisfaction is a non-differentiator in driving app usage continuance. However, the study does validate the positive effects of an agile after-sales service on consumers' sense of pleasure, for emerging platforms or those struggling with poor customer satisfaction.

One of the key supplementary findings of this study is the significantly low repurchase intentions of the Gen Z cohort which was not observed in previous studies (McLean *et al.*, 2019; De Canio, Fuentes-Blasco and Martinelli, 2021). This is of particular interest to the M-commerce industry in the UAE, in developing retention programs specifically tailored to Gen Zs. In this way, the study provides original geographic insights from the Middle Eastern region which has been largely overlooked in the fashion and app marketing literature, despite its commercial potential and cultural significance (Euromonitor, 2021b). Overall, this study offers a window to organizations rapidly embracing agile manifestos, into what the implications of

strategic agility look like from a consumer perspective, and how they may tap into it to build user retention.

5.4.   Limitations and areas for further research

Findings from this study under are the constraint of various limitations thereby providing scope for improvement. Firstly, the study is subjected to some design limitations. As is the case with most cross sectional studies, the sample size for this study is relatively low, despite meeting the minimum sample size requirements. Therefore, further studies could be made more robust by including larger sample sizes and performing quota sampling (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Re-designing the study using multi or mixed methods could also produce more robust results (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). In addition, the significant influence of age group on repeat purchases indicates the need to conduct future research in controlled environments to limit the effects of demographics (De Canio, Fuentes-Blasco and Martinelli, 2021).

Secondly, results from this study are specific only to the high street context of pureplay multibrand fashion apps in the UAE. Future research could examine AMCs in a luxury setting, in different geographies to enhance reliability and validity. Given that luxury consumers differ significantly from high street shoppers, and how the luxury segment itself thrives on being rare and exclusive, perhaps there would be some variations between how luxury consumers respond to AMCs (Varley *et al.*, 2019; Desmichela and Kocher, 2020). Future studies could also examine how a concept like agile marketing, largely driven by speed, can be made relevant to emerging areas in fashion such as sustainability and slow fashion, which oppose the very idea of rapid turnover. This would enable industry practitioners to have an understanding about the environmental consequences of running an agile business.

Next, this study investigates only the combined impact of AMCs and consumers' emotional states on repurchase intentions. Future research could separately question the direct impact of AMCs on desired consumer behaviour. This would also open up possibilities to perform mediation analysis so as to compare the differences between direct and indirect influences of AMCs on purchase behaviour (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Theoretically, this study is based on the principles of environmental psychology (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), examining AMCs as a marketing stimuli in the pureplay environment. Subsequent studies could consider evaluating AMCs from different theoretical perspectives such as the two factor theory used by Lim *et al.* (2021), where in AMCs could be divided into hygiene factors (basic agile

necessities) and motivation factors (advanced agile capabilities) to understand how various levels of agile marketing affect consumer behaviour. In line with agility, this research identifies five agile dimensions relevant to the current context. Given the novelty of the research area, other researchers may consider developing agile predictors relevant to their context followed by empirical testing. Lastly, since the effect of pleasure was particularly insignificant on repurchase intentions, other agile predictors could be identified which specifically contribute to feelings of pleasure, such as incentivization and gamification, and revalidate whether or not pleasure influences repeat purchases.